**Discipline—Teaching, not Suppressing**

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Just last year Adrian Peterson sparked national conversation about physical discipline after he injured his four-year-old son with a tree branch. Even though the child had multiple cuts and bruises on his body, Peterson insisted he was using a switch as punishment— like many parents in our community might do if their kid misbehaves.

In light of Child Abuse Prevention month, let’s consider this question: when is physical discipline acceptable?

We could talk about how physical punishment increases a child’s anxiety and fear, decreases self-esteem, hinders the development of empathy and compassion for others, and teaches that violence is an acceptable way to handle conflict.

We could talk about how discipline doesn’t mean spanking or hurting a child. Discipline doesn’t mean using the same kind of punishment your parents used or lashing out in anger against a misbehaving kid. It certainly doesn’t mean “losing control” in the heat of a tense moment or hurting your child because you think that’s the only way they will learn. Simply put, discipline means *teaching.*

We could even talk about how we were spanked as children, and turned out just fine. Or how we grew up in a neighborhood where corporal punishment was normal. And spanking, after all, is not child abuse.

We could talk for hours about where we draw the line. When is physical discipline okay, and when does it go too far? And these conversations are healthy and move us a little closer to understanding positive parenting. They help us to acknowledge that physical discipline is less acceptable than we might consider it to be.

But this year, let’s act. Let’s begin to practice positive discipline when we’re parenting our children. When your child misbehaves, do not hit, slap, harm or injure, but remain calm and model for your child the type of behavior you want to see in them. Check out a local parenting class [here](http://www.families-first.org/) or watch an [informational show](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roFAj_mmw00) about strategies for positive discipline.

This year, let’s teach our children that they are loved, respected, and worth more than a “whooping.”